

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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### FEDERAL-STATE COOPERATION RESTORES WILD TURKEYS

Ben Franklin said a wild turkey should have been our national bird, not the eagle.

Explorers of mid-America found it a more dependable food supply than any forest species.

But traditionalists mourned its disappearance as farming, ranching and industry spread. In many States, 20 years ago, the few remaining birds were in lonely, isolated pockets, while docile domesticated varieties took over the land to provide pièces de résistance on holidays. For fifty years, 1900 to 1950, land-use patterns of forestry, grazing and farming sent the proud-striding wild turkey down a dusty road to oblivion. They were practically extinct in the North Central United States, an area ranging down through Southern Missouri.

State agencies tried hatchery-reared turkeys in restocking attempts, then crosses of wild gobblers with game farm hens. Results were poor in most cases--and there was a danger of infecting remaining wild birds with domestic diseases.

But some careful, well-organized turkey research was going on in State wildlife agencies, much of it financed by Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration (Pittman-Robertson) funds. Administered by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, the Pittman-Robertson Act levies an 11 percent excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition. These funds are allocated to the States proportionately, on the basis of paid license holders and land area, to be used for approved projects that supplement existing State programs. Research and acquisition money from the fund have helped turkey restoration in areas as diverse as the Dakotas, Wisconsin, Missouri, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Nebraska, and Illinois.

Restoration of this magnificent bird was not just a matter of stocking. Proper habitat was vital; so were livetrapped wild birds. Foresters came into the picture; so did cannon nets and stocking techniques shared through Federal Aid programs. And that is when the turkeys began to prowl limestone bluffs or gobble through forest glades again.

The technology of the cannon net, whereby tiny mortars fire a large "seine" out over feeding wild turkeys to trap them unhurt, proved valuable in providing a supply of stockable birds. In addition to managing for better habitat, foresters were vital observers in the developing flocks and in providing broad acreage of timberlands for stocking livetrapped birds. New techniques in transportation and release were worked out, with the information shared between States. The number of birds that must be stocked for a viable flock was important.

It was far from being a cheap operation. But by trading the research information back and forth, turkey managers avoided the repetition of mistakes and saved time. Results came quickly as new knowledge was applied.

One example: Missouri had not hunted turkeys since 1938, but after four years of new management (using a remnant of native gobblers) it opened a hunting season in 1960 and by 1969 had birds in key locations all over the State.

Other States repeated the same performance amounting basically to an interlocked program: Research, cooperation, livetrapping, stocking--and then hunting by gunners whose special taxes and permits had financed an expensive, difficult operation.

Wild turkeys have come a long way in the last decade, participants agreed in a national wild turkey symposium last winter. The meeting brought 250 biologists from 45 States together at Columbia, Mo., to discuss the revival of one of the world's great game birds.

They stressed that habitat must be preserved, said plans for timber management must include better plans for turkey management, and demanded more information on the bird's ability to eat a variety of foods. And they flattered the gobbler's evasive ability by admitting there weren't any good techniques for counting them.

Most of all, they recognized that the work of wildlife biologists, given research support and coordination, could provide wild things as long as there was habitat, public interest--and financial backing.

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